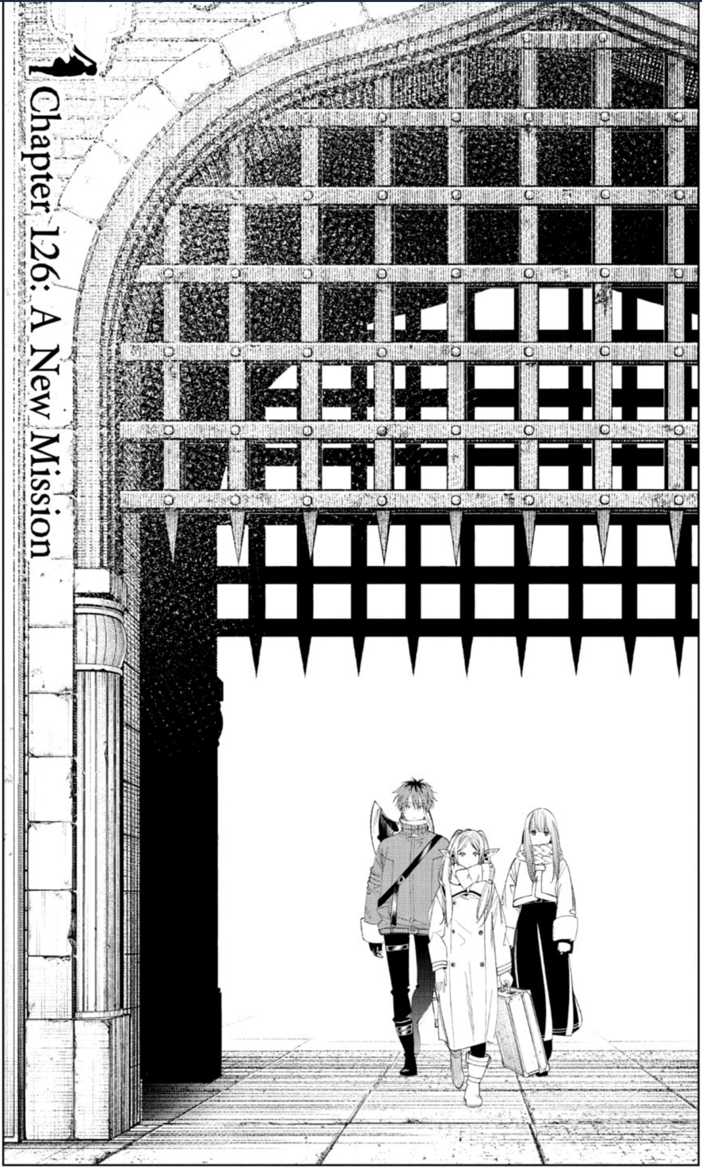
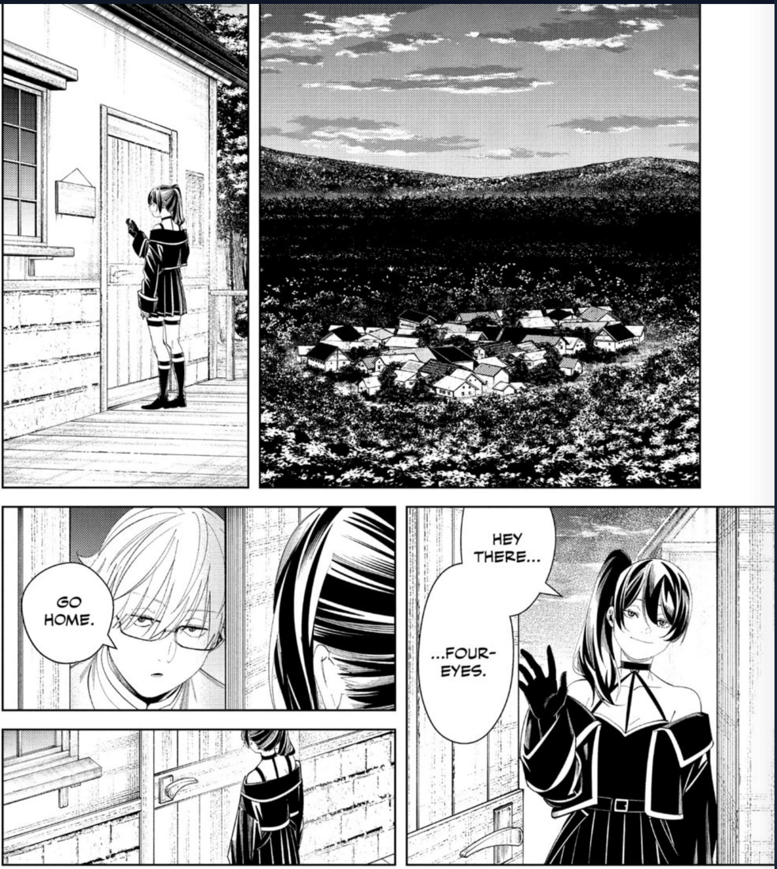
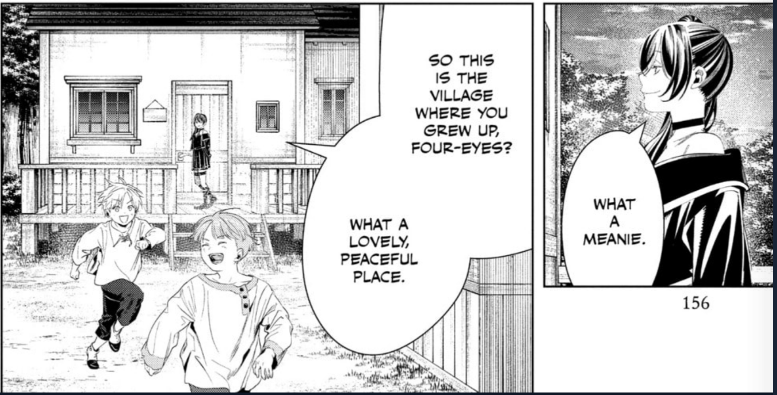
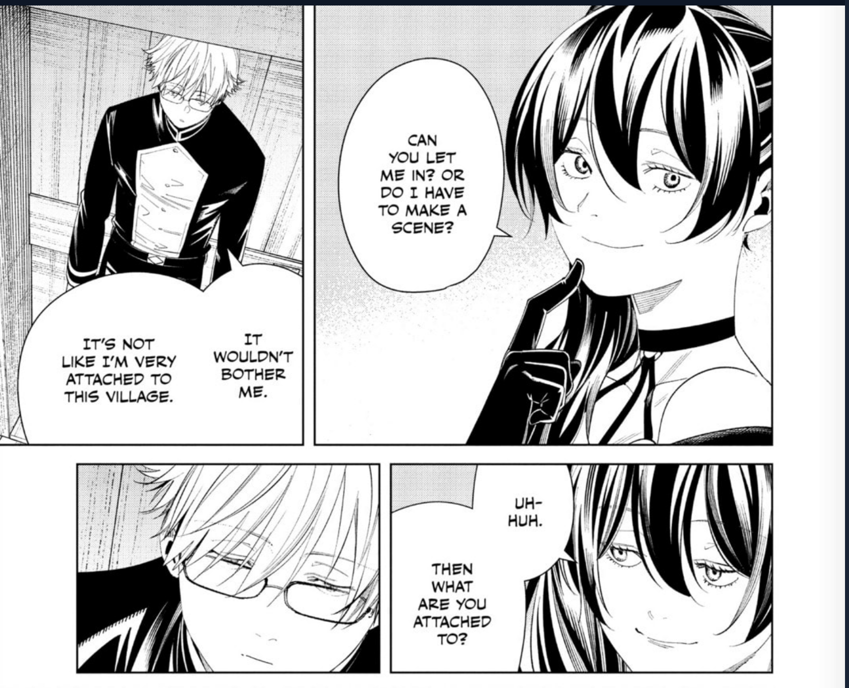
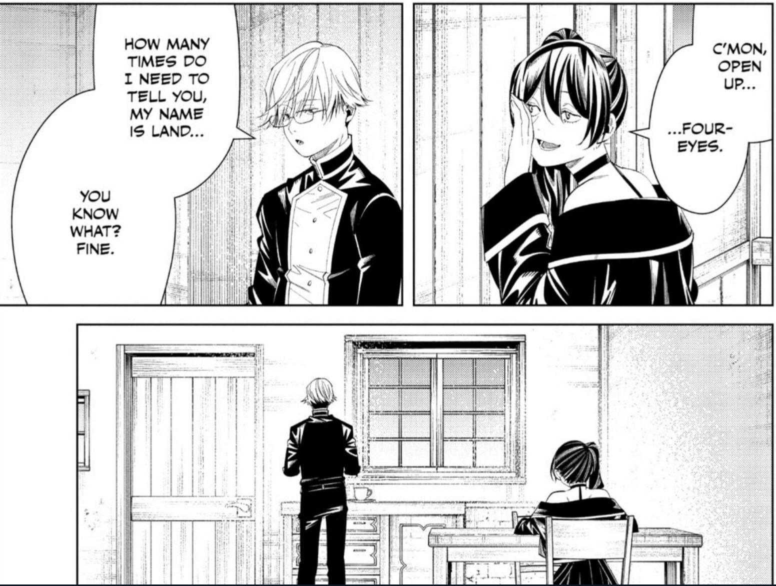
Chapter 126: A New Mission

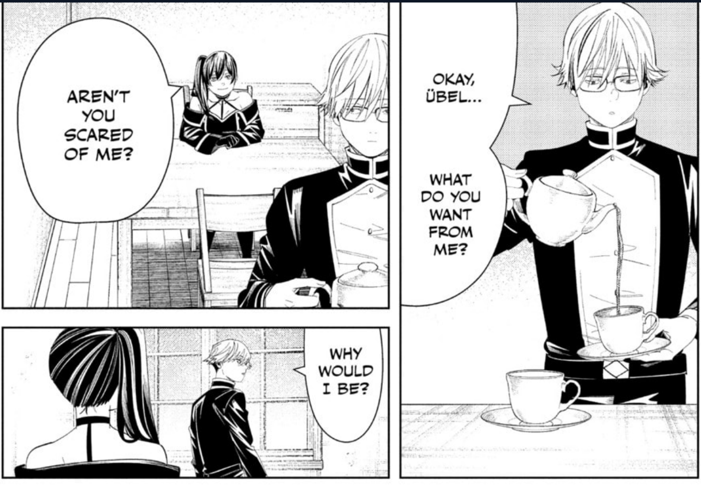


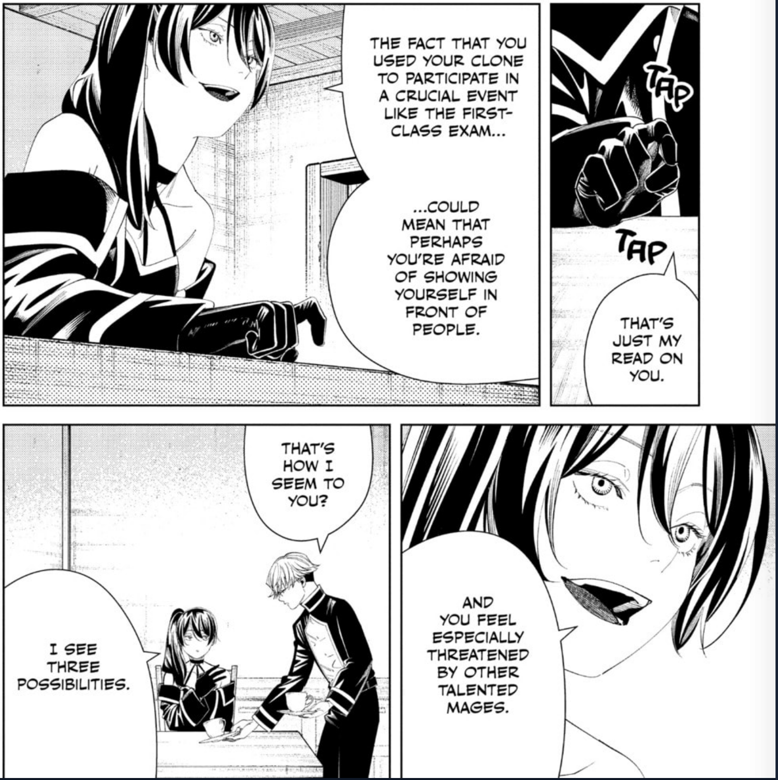

HEY THERE...
...FOUR-EYES.
GO HOME.

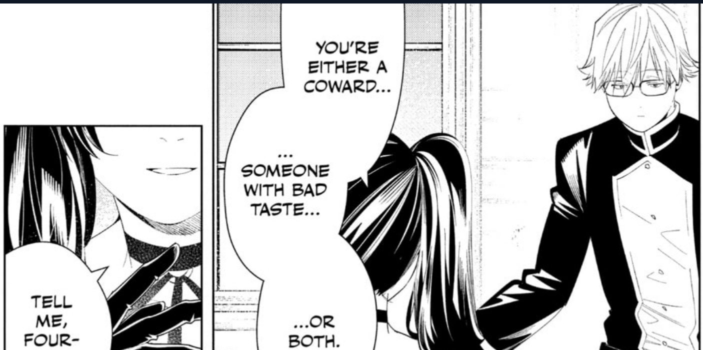

SO THIS IS THE VILLAGE WHERE YOU GREW UP, FOUR-EYES?
WHAT A LOVELY, PEACEFUL PLACE.
WHAT A MEANIE.

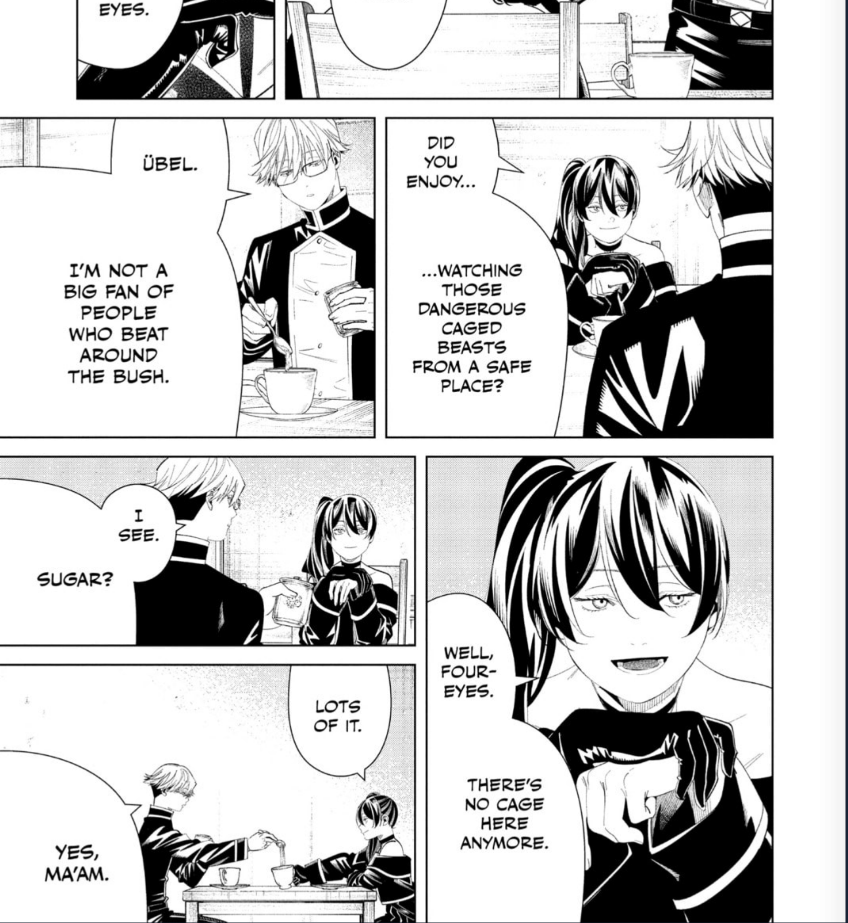

CAN YOU LET ME IN? OR DO I HAVE TO MAKE A SCENE?
IT WOULDN'T BOTHER ME.
IT'S NOT LIKE I'M VERY ATTACHED TO THIS VILLAGE.
UH-HUH.
THEN WHAT ARE YOU ATTACHED TO?

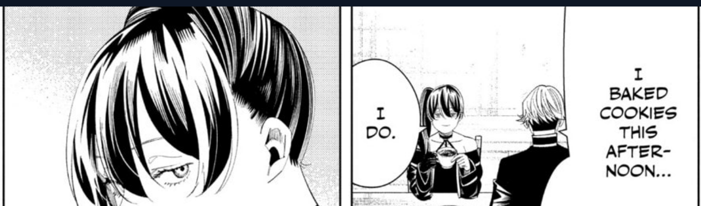

C'MON, OPEN UP...
...FOUR-EYES.
HOW MANY TIMES DO I NEED TO TELL YOU, MY NAME IS LAND...
YOU KNOW WHAT? FINE.

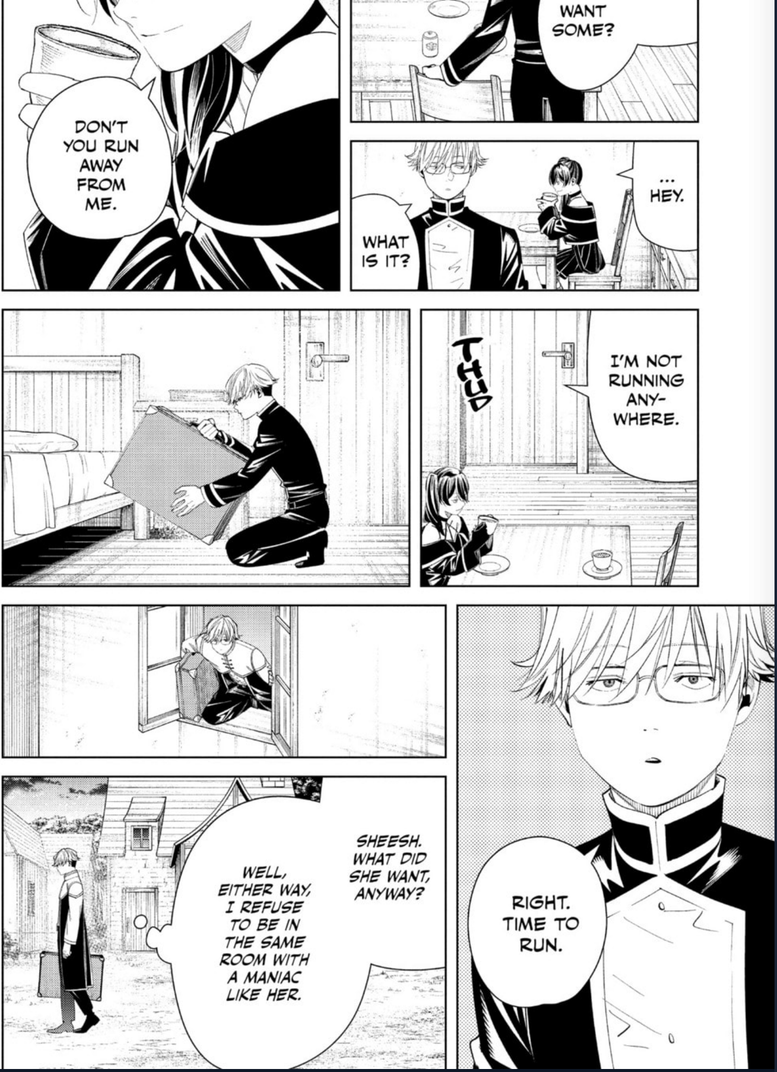

OKAY, ÜBEL...
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?
AREN'T YOU SCARED OF ME?
WHY WOULD I BE?

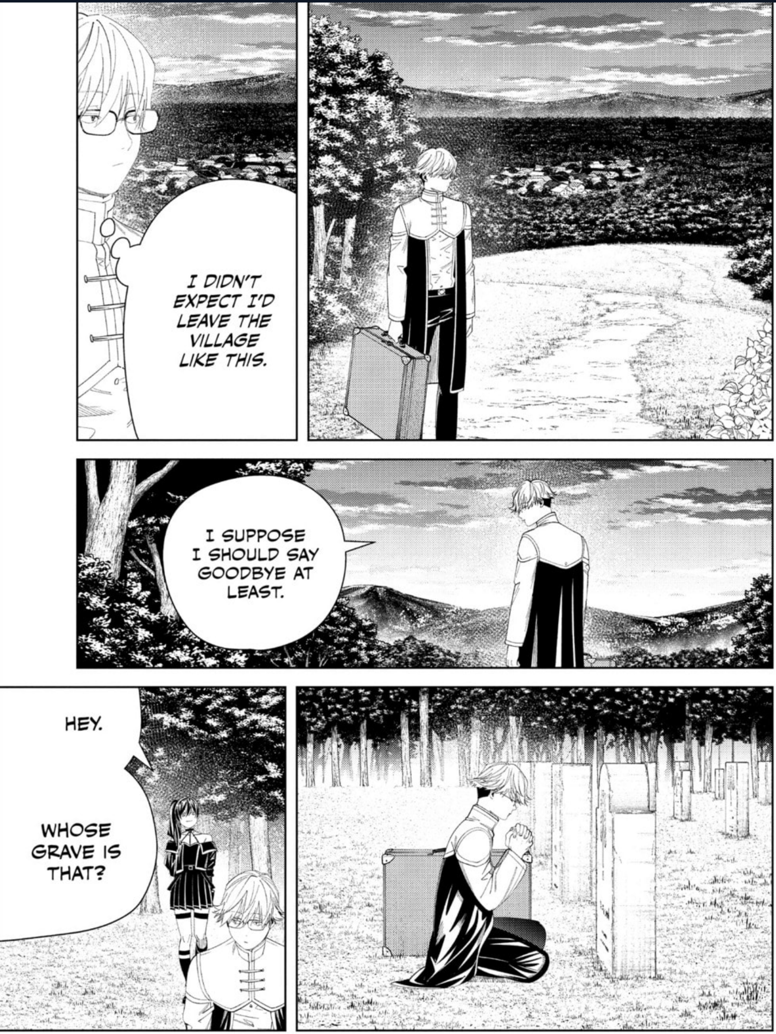

THE FACT THAT YOU USED YOUR CLONE TO PARTICIPATE IN A CRUCIAL EVENT LIKE THE FIRST-CLASS EXAM...
...COULD MEAN THAT PERHAPS YOU'RE AFRAID OF SHOWING YOURSELF IN FRONT OF PEOPLE.
TAP
TAP
THAT'S JUST MY READ ON YOU.
AND YOU FEEL ESPECIALLY THREATENED BY OTHER TALENTED MAGES.
THAT'S HOW I SEEM TO YOU?
I SEE THREE POSSIBILITIES.

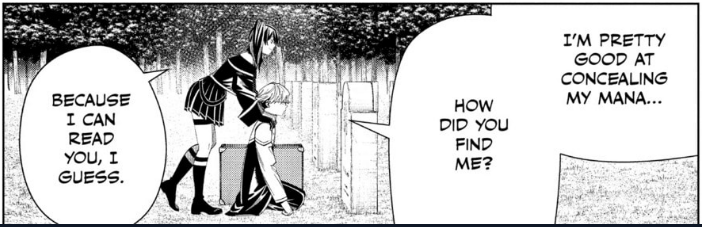

YOU'RE EITHER A COWARD...
...SOMEONE WITH BAD TASTE...
...OR BOTH.
TELL ME, FOUR-

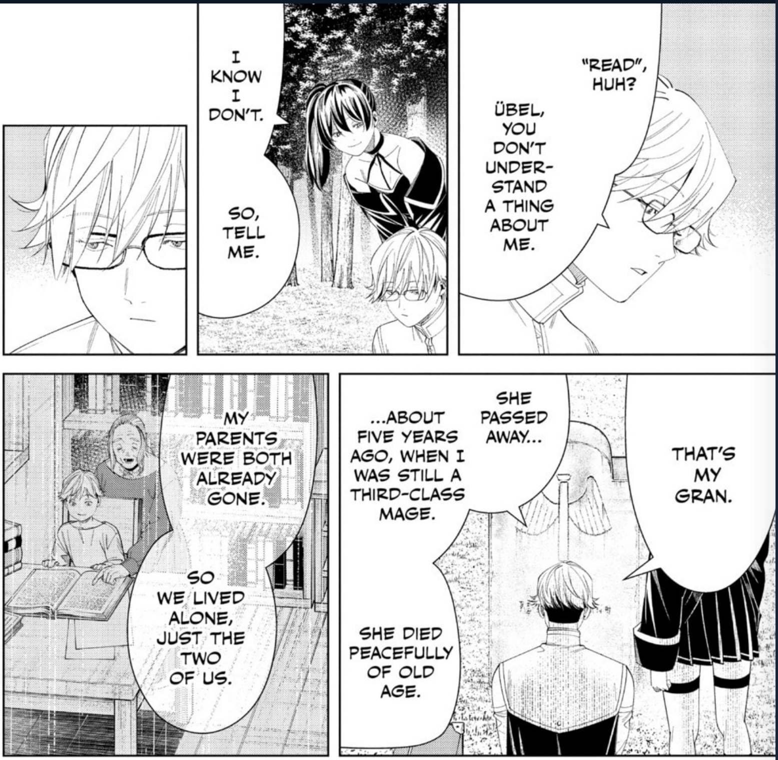

EYES.
DID YOU ENJOY...
...WATCHING THOSE DANGEROUS CAGED BEASTS FROM A SAFE PLACE?
ÜBEL.
I'M NOT A BIG FAN OF PEOPLE WHO BEAT AROUND THE BUSH.
WELL, FOUR-EYES.
THERE'S NO CAGE HERE ANYMORE.
I SEE.
SUGAR?
LOTS OF IT.
YES, MA'AM.

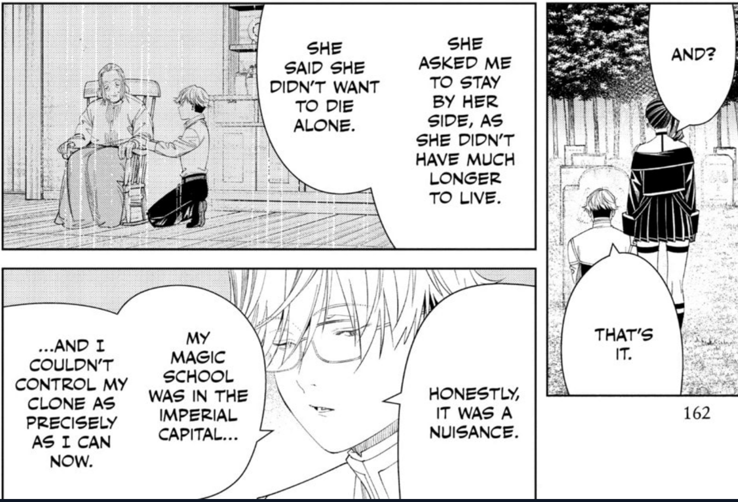

I BAKED COOKIES THIS AFTERNOON...
I DO.

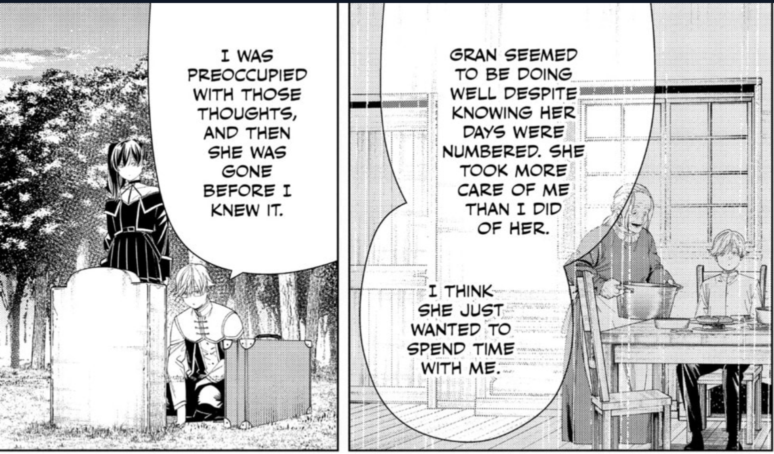

WANT SOME?
... HEY.
WHAT IS IT?
DON'T YOU RUN AWAY FROM ME.
I'M NOT RUNNING ANYWHERE.
THUD
RIGHT. TIME TO RUN.
SHEESH. WHAT DID SHE WANT, ANYWAY?
WELL, EITHER WAY, I REFUSE TO BE IN THE SAME ROOM WITH A MANIAC LIKE HER.

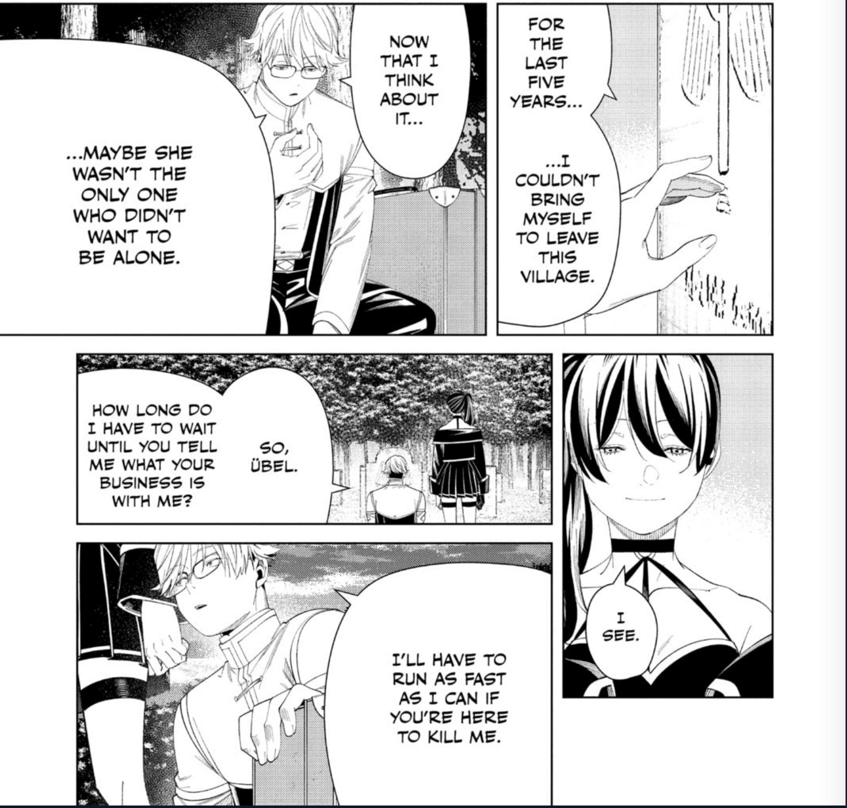

I DIDN'T EXPECT I'D LEAVE THE VILLAGE LIKE THIS.
I SUPPOSE I SHOULD SAY GOODBYE AT LEAST.
HEY.
WHOSE GRAVE IS THAT?

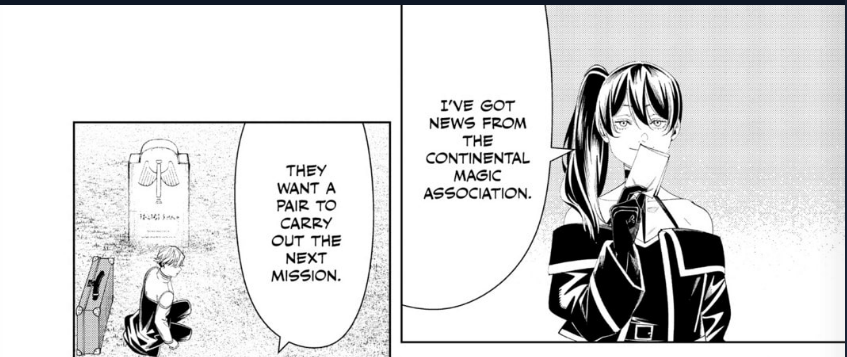

I'M PRETTY GOOD AT CONCEALING MY MANA...
HOW DID YOU FIND ME?
BECAUSE I CAN READ YOU, I GUESS.

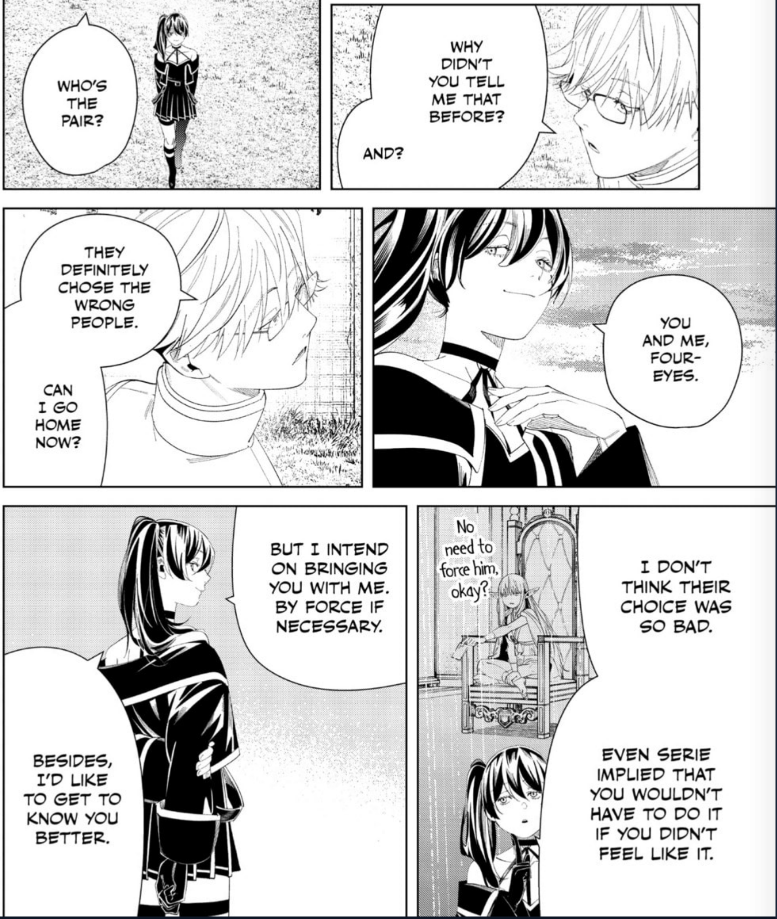

"READ", HUH?
ÜBEL, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND A THING ABOUT ME.
I KNOW I DON'T.
SO, TELL ME.
THAT'S MY GRAN.
SHE PASSED AWAY...
...ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN I WAS STILL A THIRD-CLASS MAGE.
SHE DIED PEACEFULLY OF OLD AGE.
MY PARENTS WERE BOTH ALREADY GONE.
SO WE LIVED ALONE, JUST THE TWO OF US.

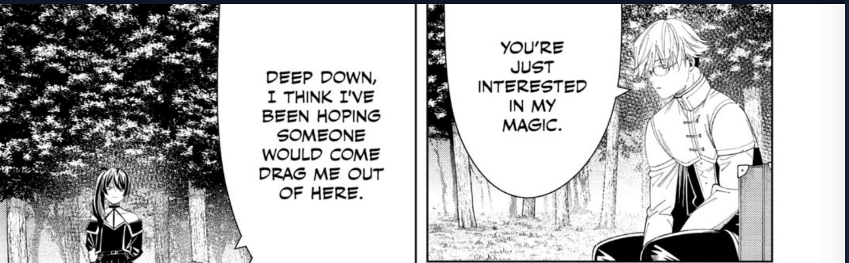

AND?
THAT'S IT.
SHE ASKED ME TO STAY BY HER SIDE, AS SHE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH LONGER TO LIVE.
SHE SAID SHE DIDN'T WANT TO DIE ALONE.
HONESTLY, IT WAS A NUISANCE.
MY MAGIC SCHOOL WAS IN THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL...
...AND I COULDN'T CONTROL MY CLONE AS PRECISELY AS I CAN NOW.

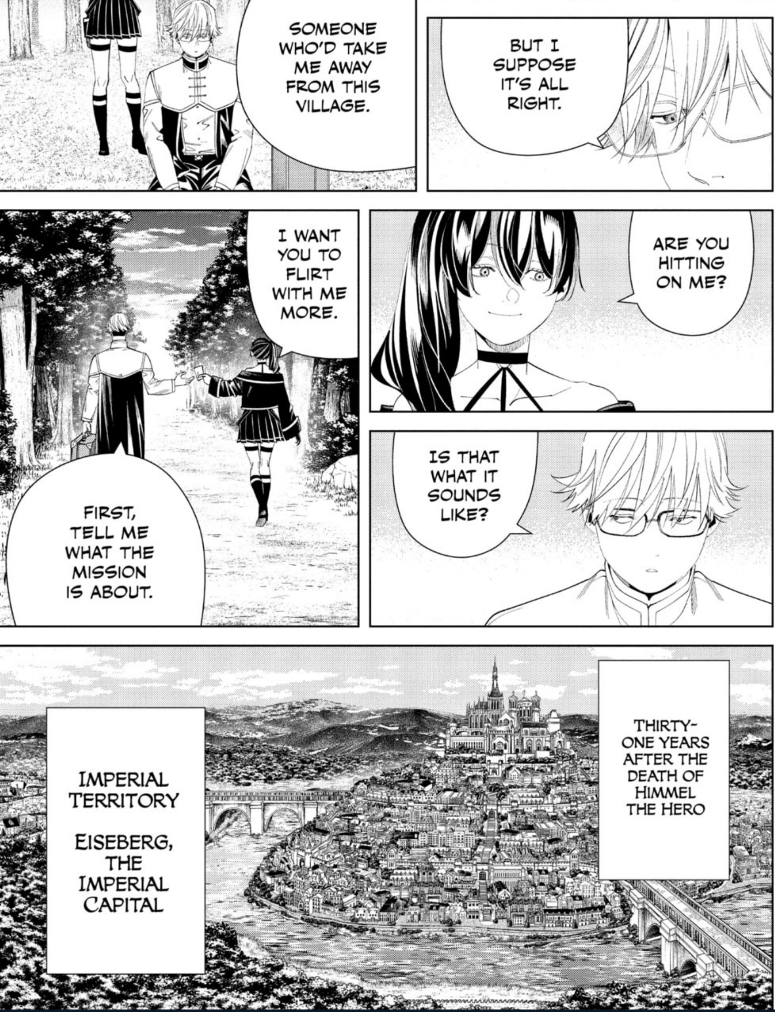

GRAN SEEMED TO BE DOING WELL DESPITE KNOWING HER DAYS WERE NUMBERED. SHE TOOK MORE CARE OF ME THAN I DID OF HER.
I THINK SHE JUST WANTED TO SPEND TIME WITH ME.
I WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH THOSE THOUGHTS, AND THEN SHE WAS GONE BEFORE I KNEW IT.

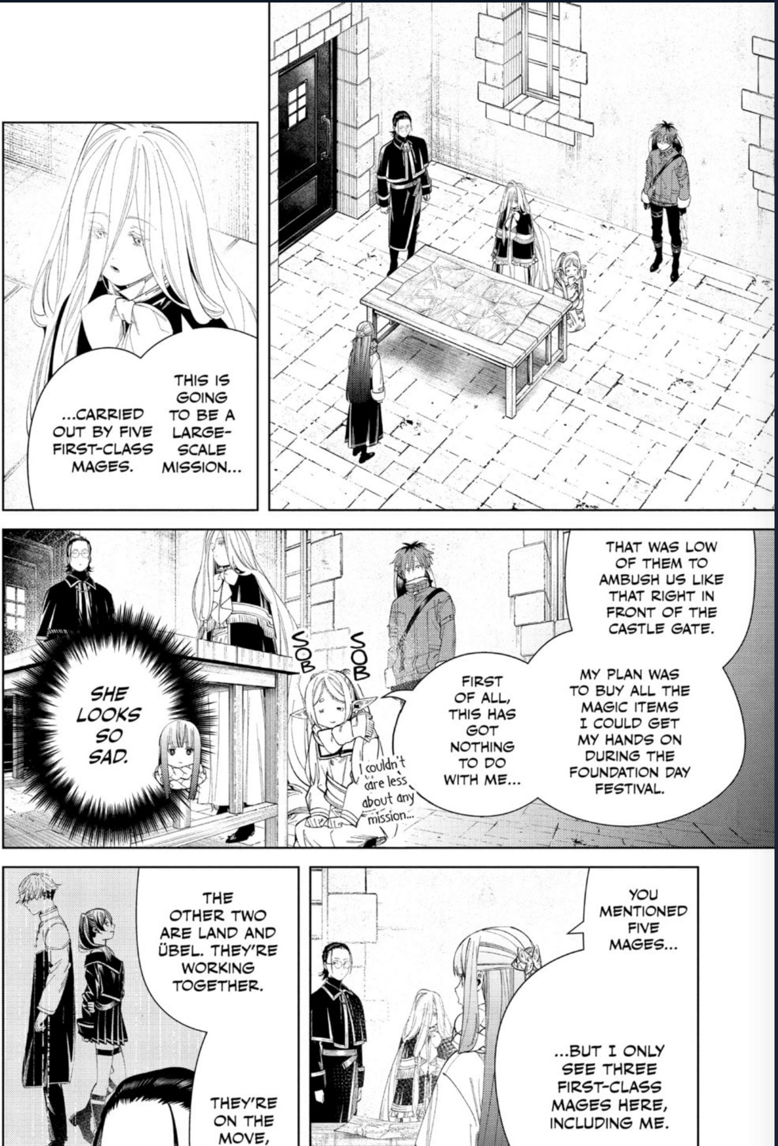

FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS...
...I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO LEAVE THIS VILLAGE.
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT...
...MAYBE SHE WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO DIDN'T WANT TO BE ALONE.
SO, ÜBEL.
HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL YOU TELL ME WHAT YOUR BUSINESS IS WITH ME?
I'LL HAVE TO RUN AS FAST AS I CAN IF YOU'RE HERE TO KILL ME.
I SEE.


I'VE GOT NEWS FROM THE CONTINENTAL MAGIC ASSOCIATION.
THEY WANT A PAIR TO CARRY OUT THE NEXT MISSION.

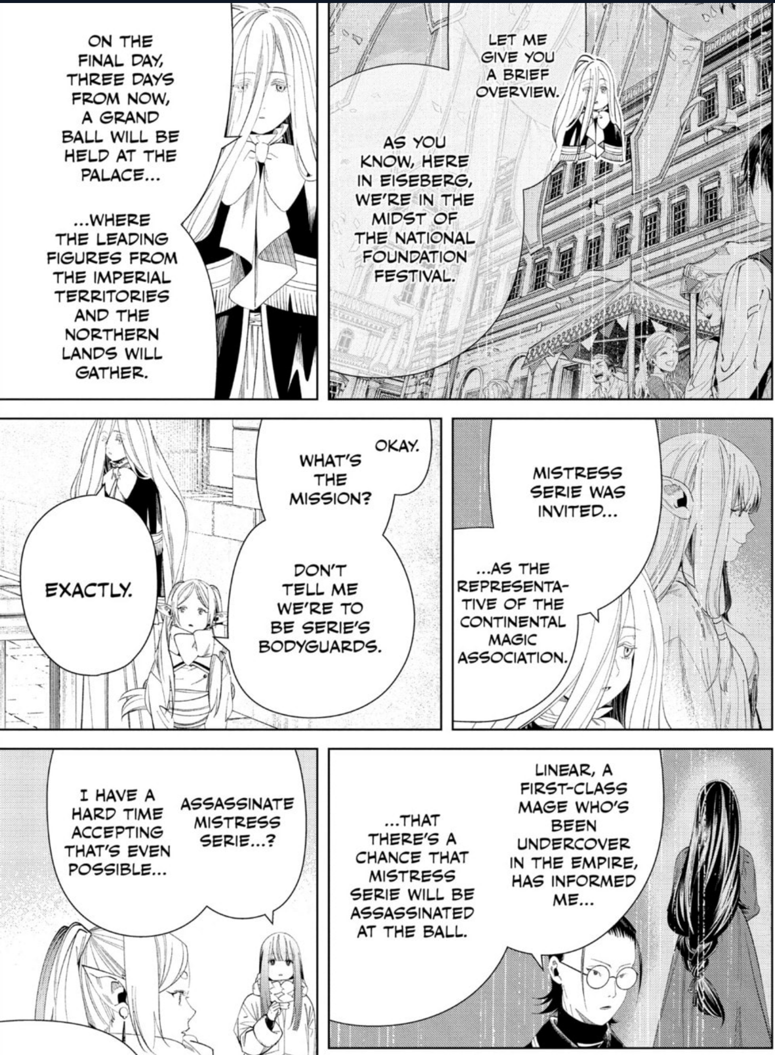

WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THAT BEFORE?
AND?
WHO'S THE PAIR?
YOU AND ME, FOUR-EYES.
THEY DEFINITELY CHOSE THE WRONG PEOPLE.
CAN I GO HOME NOW?
No need to force him, okay?
I DON'T THINK THEIR CHOICE WAS SO BAD.
EVEN SERIE IMPLIED THAT YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO DO IT IF YOU DIDN'T FEEL LIKE IT.
BUT I INTEND ON BRINGING YOU WITH ME. BY FORCE IF NECESSARY.
BESIDES, I'D LIKE TO GET TO KNOW YOU BETTER.

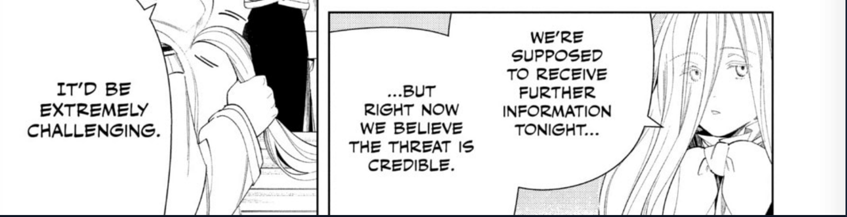

YOU'RE JUST INTERESTED IN MY MAGIC.
DEEP DOWN, I THINK I'VE BEEN HOPING SOMEONE WOULD COME DRAG ME OUT OF HERE.

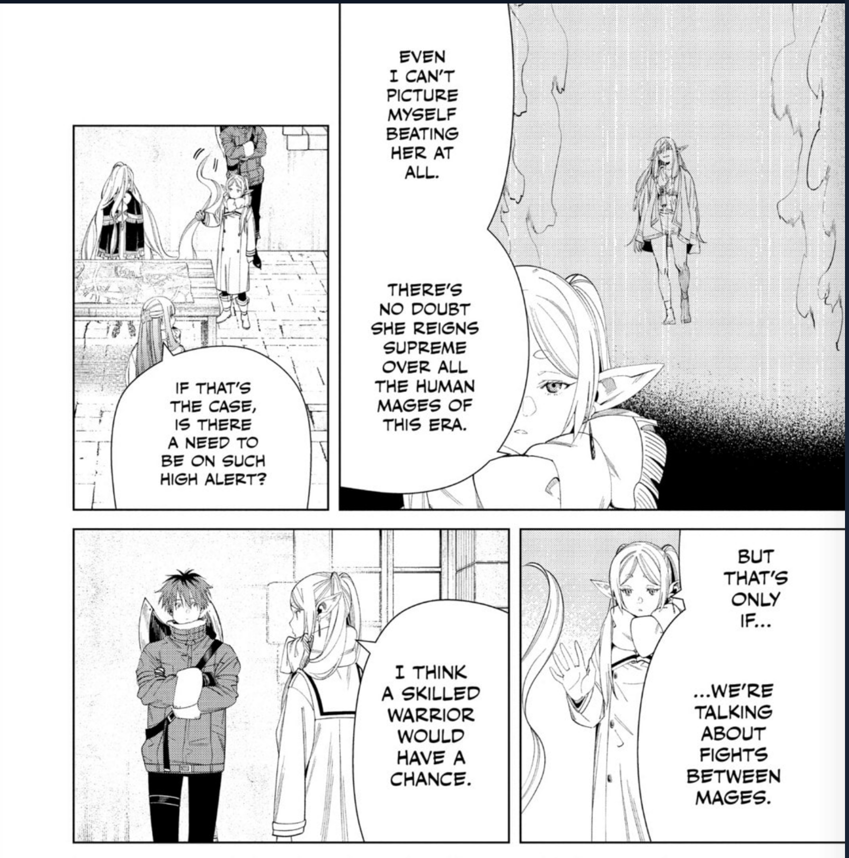

BUT I SUPPOSE IT'S ALL RIGHT.
SOMEONE WHO'D TAKE ME AWAY FROM THIS VILLAGE.
ARE YOU HITTING ON ME?
IS THAT WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE?
I WANT YOU TO FLIRT WITH ME MORE.
FIRST, TELL ME WHAT THE MISSION IS ABOUT.
THIRTY-ONE YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF HIMMEL THE HERO
IMPERIAL TERRITORY
EISEBERG, THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL

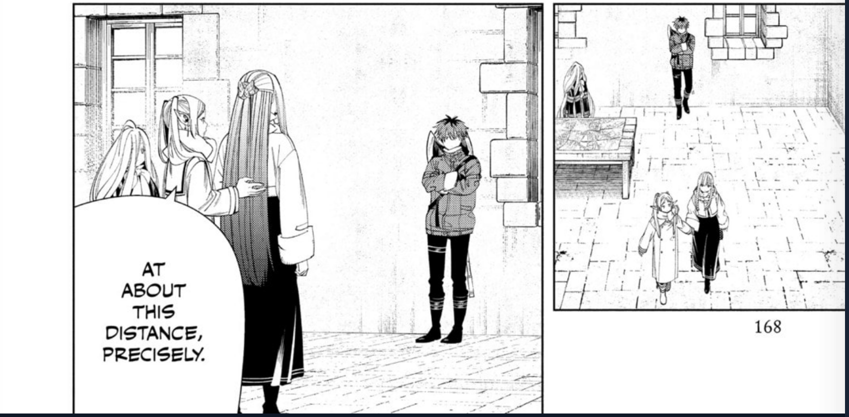

THIS IS GOING TO BE A LARGE-SCALE MISSION...
...CARRIED OUT BY FIVE FIRST-CLASS MAGES.
THAT WAS LOW OF THEM TO AMBUSH US LIKE THAT RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE CASTLE GATE.
MY PLAN WAS TO BUY ALL THE MAGIC ITEMS I COULD GET MY HANDS ON DURING THE FOUNDATION DAY FESTIVAL.
FIRST OF ALL, THIS HAS GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH ME...
I couldn't care less about any mission...
SOB SOB
SHE LOOKS SO SAD.
YOU MENTIONED FIVE MAGES...
...BUT I ONLY SEE THREE FIRST-CLASS MAGES HERE, INCLUDING ME.
THE OTHER TWO ARE LAND AND ÜBEL. THEY'RE WORKING TOGETHER.
THEY'RE ON THE MOVE,

GATHERING INTEL FOR US NOW.


LET ME GIVE YOU A BRIEF OVERVIEW.
AS YOU KNOW, HERE IN EISEBERG, WE'RE IN THE MIDST OF THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FESTIVAL.
ON THE FINAL DAY, THREE DAYS FROM NOW, A GRAND BALL WILL BE HELD AT THE PALACE...
...WHERE THE LEADING FIGURES FROM THE IMPERIAL TERRITORIES AND THE NORTHERN LANDS WILL GATHER.
MISTRESS SERIE WAS INVITED...
...AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CONTINENTAL MAGIC ASSOCIATION.
OKAY.
WHAT'S THE MISSION?
DON'T TELL ME WE'RE TO BE SERIE'S BODYGUARDS.
EXACTLY.
LINEAR, A FIRST-CLASS MAGE WHO'S BEEN UNDERCOVER IN THE EMPIRE, HAS INFORMED ME...
...THAT THERE'S A CHANCE THAT MISTRESS SERIE WILL BE ASSASSINATED AT THE BALL.
ASSASSINATE MISTRESS SERIE...?
I HAVE A HARD TIME ACCEPTING THAT'S EVEN POSSIBLE...


WE'RE SUPPOSED TO RECEIVE FURTHER INFORMATION TONIGHT...
...BUT RIGHT NOW WE BELIEVE THE THREAT IS CREDIBLE.
IT'D BE EXTREMELY CHALLENGING.


EVEN I CAN'T PICTURE MYSELF BEATING HER AT ALL.
THERE'S NO DOUBT SHE REIGNS SUPREME OVER ALL THE HUMAN MAGES OF THIS ERA.
IF THAT'S THE CASE, IS THERE A NEED TO BE ON SUCH HIGH ALERT?
BUT THAT'S ONLY IF...
...WE'RE TALKING ABOUT FIGHTS BETWEEN MAGES.
I THINK A SKILLED WARRIOR WOULD HAVE A CHANCE.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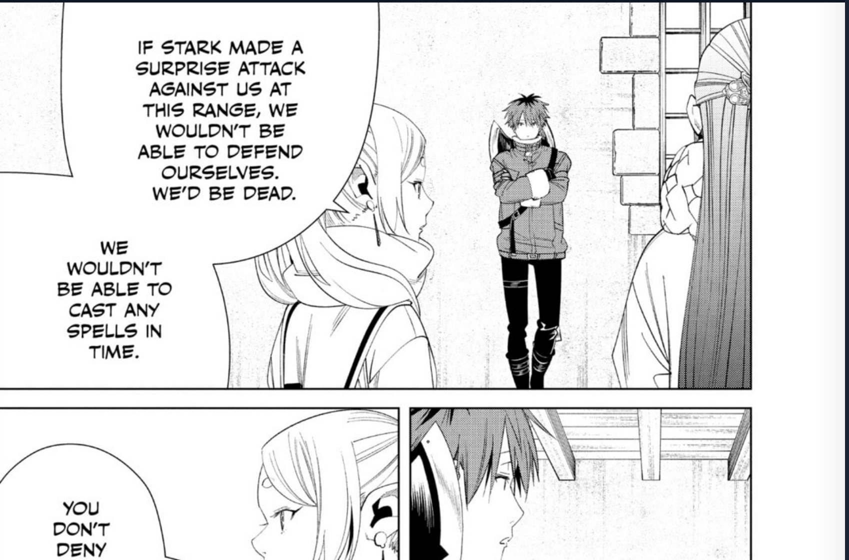
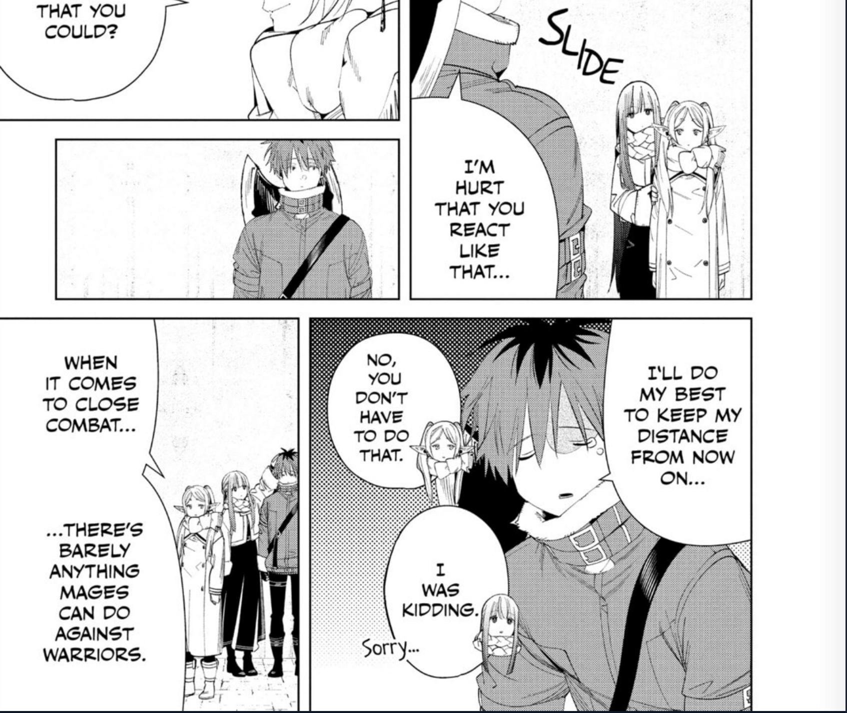
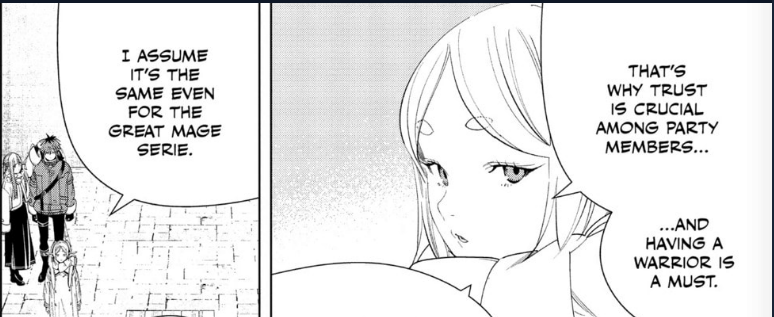
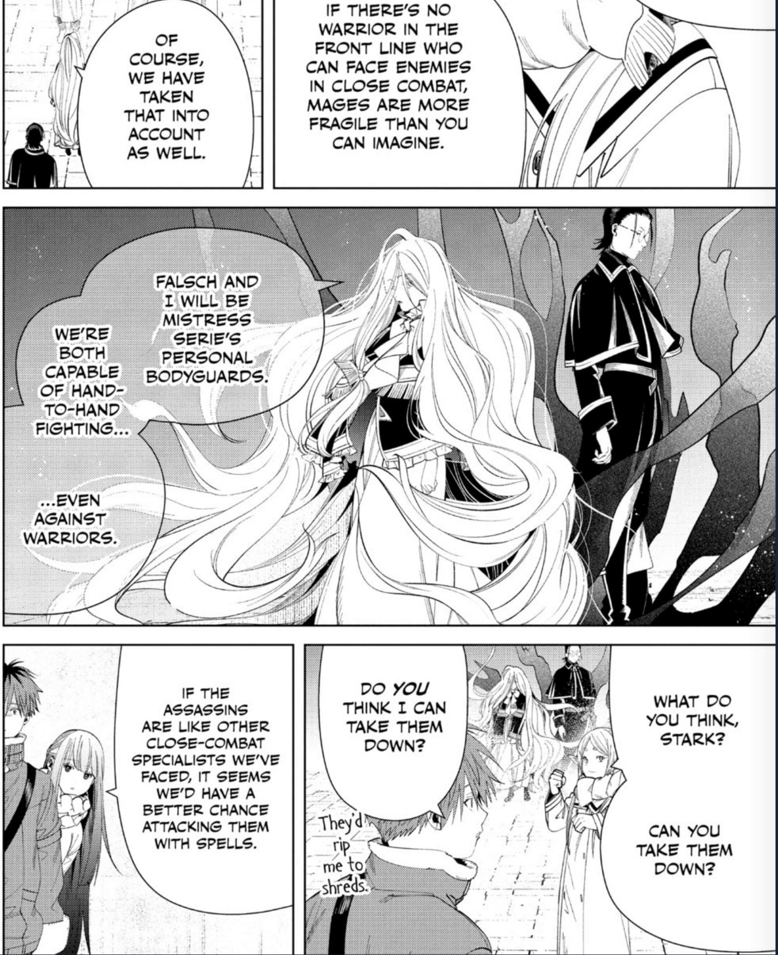
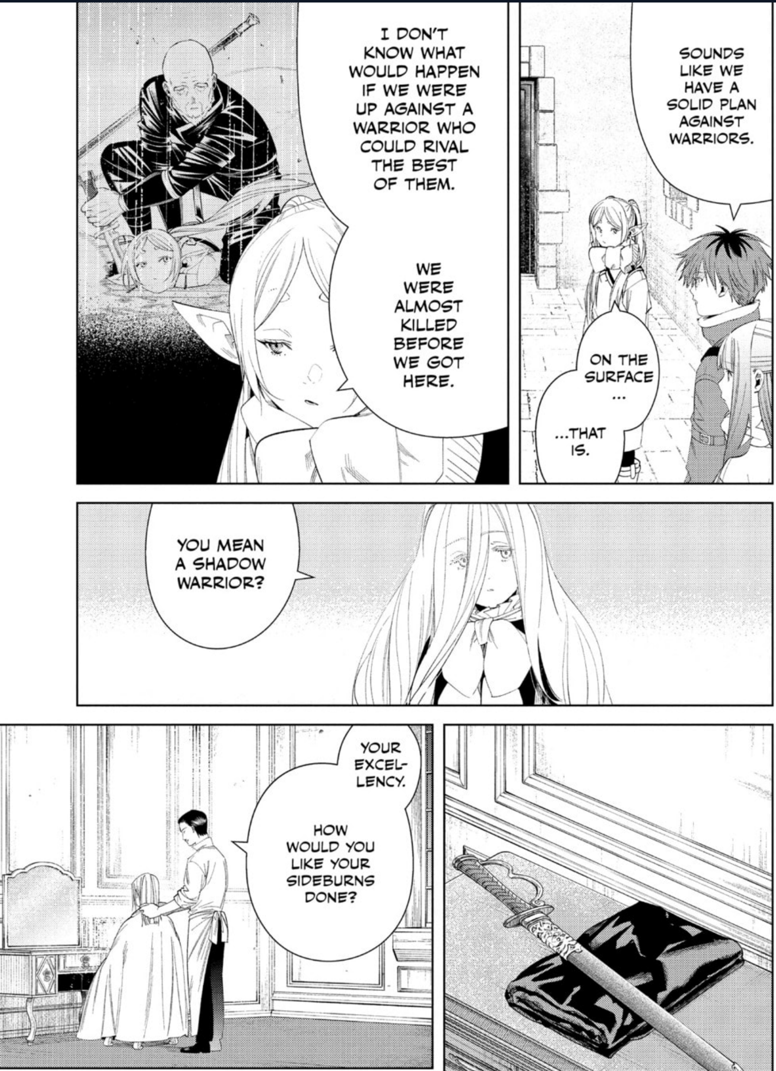
AT ABOUT THIS DISTANCE, PRECISELY.

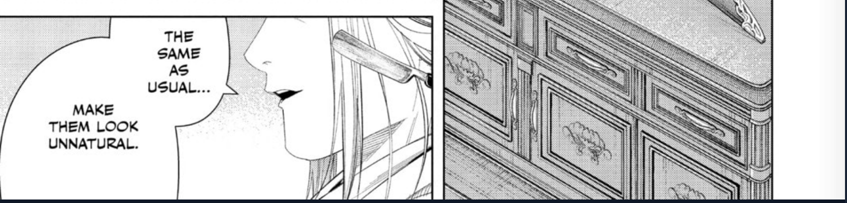

IF STARK MADE A SURPRISE ATTACK AGAINST US AT THIS RANGE, WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DEFEND OURSELVES. WE'D BE DEAD.
WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO CAST ANY SPELLS IN TIME.
YOU DON'T DENY

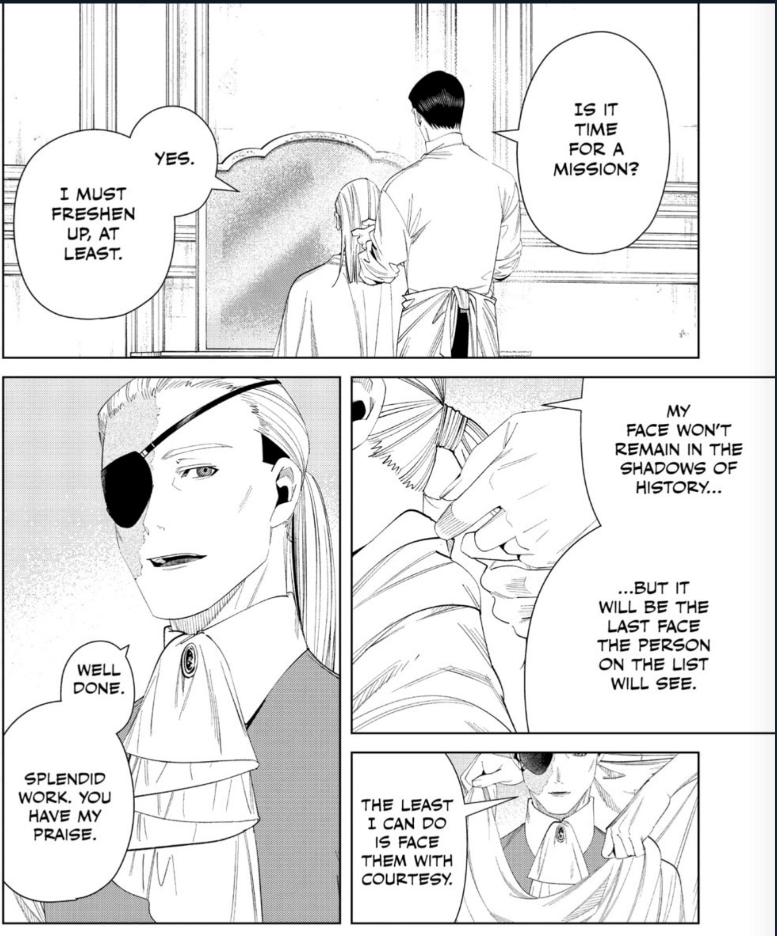

THAT YOU COULD?
SLIDE
I'M HURT THAT YOU REACT LIKE THAT...
I'LL DO MY BEST TO KEEP MY DISTANCE FROM NOW ON...
NO, YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT.
I WAS KIDDING.
Sorry...
WHEN IT COMES TO CLOSE COMBAT...
...THERE'S BARELY ANYTHING MAGES CAN DO AGAINST WARRIORS.

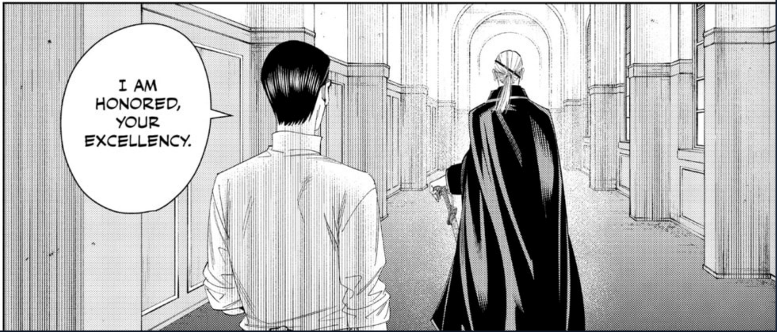

THAT'S WHY TRUST IS CRUCIAL AMONG PARTY MEMBERS...
...AND HAVING A WARRIOR IS A MUST.
I ASSUME IT'S THE SAME EVEN FOR THE GREAT MAGE SERIE.


IF THERE'S NO WARRIOR IN THE FRONT LINE WHO CAN FACE ENEMIES IN CLOSE COMBAT, MAGES ARE MORE FRAGILE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE.
OF COURSE, WE HAVE TAKEN THAT INTO ACCOUNT AS WELL.
FALSCH AND I WILL BE MISTRESS SERIE'S PERSONAL BODYGUARDS.
WE'RE BOTH CAPABLE OF HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING...
...EVEN AGAINST WARRIORS.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, STARK?
CAN YOU TAKE THEM DOWN?
DO *YOU* THINK I CAN TAKE THEM DOWN?
They'd rip me to shreds.
IF THE ASSASSINS ARE LIKE OTHER CLOSE-COMBAT SPECIALISTS WE'VE FACED, IT SEEMS WE'D HAVE A BETTER CHANCE ATTACKING THEM WITH SPELLS.


SOUNDS LIKE WE HAVE A SOLID PLAN AGAINST WARRIORS.
ON THE SURFACE ...
...THAT IS.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE WERE UP AGAINST A WARRIOR WHO COULD RIVAL THE BEST OF THEM.
WE WERE ALMOST KILLED BEFORE WE GOT HERE.
YOU MEAN A SHADOW WARRIOR?
YOUR EXCELLENCY.
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR SIDEBURNS DONE?


THE SAME AS USUAL...
MAKE THEM LOOK UNNATURAL.


IS IT TIME FOR A MISSION?
YES.
I MUST FRESHEN UP, AT LEAST.
MY FACE WON'T REMAIN IN THE SHADOWS OF HISTORY...
...BUT IT WILL BE THE LAST FACE THE PERSON ON THE LIST WILL SEE.
THE LEAST I CAN DO IS FACE THEM WITH COURTESY.
WELL DONE.
SPLENDID WORK. YOU HAVE MY PRAISE.


I AM HONORED, YOUR EXCELLENCY.

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